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divided into groups of five families who are mutually responsible for each other's behaviour, and in duty bound to report misdemeanours to the village headman. In very populous villages the groups of five families are further combined in groups of fifty families under the headman of the villages.

This system gives the government information and places responsibility on the shoulders of a definite number of individuals who cannot evade it, but the actual working of the organisation depends on the villagers themselves, and their headmen or elders, who are chosen by them, and not appointed by the government. The elders or headmen are chosen when vacancies occur by the resident heads of families, and the office is tenable for life. If the elder should prove very unsatisfactory he can be deposed, or ignored by the villagers, since his authority has no real legal foundation and can only be exercised by the consent and co-operation of his fellow-villagers. This authority is none the less extensive. The elders can call upon the village levy to chase or apprehend a criminal, and it is they who decide how the government demands for forced labour shall be met. The forced labour system, which is sometimes represented almost as a form of servitude, is really to be regarded as a form of taxation, the peasants being called upon to give their strength rather than their money for the service of the state. It is obvious that if the state were to hire labour for all the public works now carried out by forced labour, taxation would have to be increased far above the present levels, as may be seen by comparing the rates of taxation in Yunnan with those in adjoining Burma, where the government has to pay wages for labour done on public works.

When a large scale work is in progress such as the building of the motor road to Burma, the government decrees that each *hsien* along the route, or in the vicinity, must supply so many men, or rather workers (since women are used on

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this work also) for a specified length of time, usually a month at a time in the seasons which are slackest on the land. The magistrate then instructs the village headmen that so many men are required from each village in proportion to the number of families living in it. The headmen have the duty of deciding who shall go. As the headman has no force at his disposal other than the levy of the villagers themselves, he is obliged to fulfil his duties with tact and justice, for decisions which outraged the opinions of the villagers could not be enforced. In this sense the government of rural China is truly democratic in practice.

The picture of course can easily be idealised, if the darker side is ignored. Headmen, though forced to conform to the opinion of the villagers as a whole on important matters, are often men of wealth and large landowners, and as such they tend to become the moneylenders of the village also. This means that an unscrupulous man can practise many petty tyrannies on those who owe him money or have offended him in some way, without the distant and indifferent government exercising any control. In former times a man who went too far might find his granary or his house fired at night, but the emphasis on bandit suppression has tended to make such acts of revenge too dangerous to-day. The system works well when the demands made upon it are traditional and regular, but if too great a strain is placed upon the resources of the villages, and the headman becomes in fact the agent of a grasping and extortionate régime, it speedily breaks down. Honest and just men refuse the invidious task of the headman, and less scrupulous elements intent on their own profit, take over these duties to curry favour with the government. Fortunately this has not happened in recent years in the Ta Li region, for though the heavy demands for forced labour on the great motor road were met with difficulty and grumbling, the government wisely realised